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PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 20. Humanitarian assistance

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20.1 The legislative authority for the programme derives from General Assembly resolutions 46/182 of 19 December 1991, 47/168 of 22 December 1992, 48/57 of 14 December 1993 and 49/139 A of 20 December 1994 and Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56, which confirmed and reinforced earlier decisions and resolutions adopted by the Assembly and the Council concerning coordination of humanitarian assistance and emphasized the leadership role of the Secretary-General in responding to natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. The programme is under the responsibility of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

20.2 The overall orientation of the programme is to ensure the timely, coherent and coordinated response of the international community to disasters and emergencies; to promote prevention, preparedness and mitigation measures aimed at the reduction of vulnerability of those affected by such events; and to facilitate the elaboration of policies to guide the work of the humanitarian community and the smooth transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation and development.

20.3 During the period covered by the plan, the focus will be on achieving further progress in the following areas:

(a) Promotion of preparedness and early warning measures to prevent natural and technological disasters and humanitarian emergencies;

(b) Coherent and efficient response to disasters and emergencies through timely consultations with appropriate partners, rapid deployment of inter-agency assessment missions, development of humanitarian strategies, establishment of coordination structures, allocation of responsibilities among agencies and facilitation of humanitarian assistance delivery to those in need;

(c) Strengthening the mechanisms available to support the coordination mandate of the Department, which include leadership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, administration of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, and responsibility for the Consolidated Appeals Process;

(d) Implementation of mitigation programmes to include consolidation of the results achieved by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction;

(e) Formulation and refinement, in consultation with humanitarian partners, of principles and policies that govern humanitarian actions in the context of its advocacy role;

(f) Acceleration and strengthened coordination of United Nations demining programmes.

Subprogramme 20.1 Policy and analysis

20.4 The objectives of the subprogramme, for which the Policy and Analysis Division is responsible, are as follows:

(a) To develop coherent United Nations system policies on humanitarian issues and advocate humanitarian norms and policies;

(b) To promote the formulation and/or refinement of policy on access to and protection of victims of conflict; United Nations system responsibilities for internally displaced persons; humanitarian interface with peace-keeping operations; security for humanitarian staff and supplies in conflict situations; and linkages and transition from relief to reconstruction and rehabilitation;

(c) To expand the database on emergency crises of the Humanitarian Early Warning System and improve linkages between the System and other relevant United Nations departments and agencies;

(d) To strengthen future humanitarian operations by promoting the application of lessons learned from the evaluation of the coordination of past humanitarian assistance operations;

(e) To establish improved and well-coordinated United Nations mine-clearance programmes and to provide them with necessary support; to develop, refine and distribute standard teaching materials for mine-awareness education programmes, including the maintenance and expansion of the landmine database of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs; to encourage and promote development of new technologies for the benefit of mine clearance operations; to mobilize resources for the United Nations Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance; and to advocate support for mine-related action and a comprehensive ban on the production, export and use of landmines through publications, a regular newsletter and pursuit of a strategy to raise awareness of the landmine problem.

Subprogramme 20.2 Complex emergencies

20.5 The subprogramme, under the responsibility of the Complex Emergency Division, focuses on two areas: pre-emergency operations and new complex emergencies.

20.6 During pre-emergency operations, the objectives are:

(a) To expand and improve existing mechanisms for information-sharing within the United Nations Secretariat, with specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and other humanitarian partners;

(b) To make better use of early warning information and more systematic contingency planning for humanitarian programmes;

(c) To develop further existing standby arrangements with outside providers of emergency staff and equipment to improve both the Department and systemic responses;

(d) To develop a strategy and operations plan for system-wide training, drawing on existing assets such as the Disaster Management Training Programme and the Complex Emergency Training Initiative. This will include establishment of a training programme for complex emergency coordination staff at the Headquarters and field levels with emphasis on coordination skills, improved humanitarian assessment techniques and contingency planning;

(e) To improve synergies and efficiencies between natural disaster and complex emergency staff within the Department by consolidating common services and joint development of standby arrangements.

20.7 In the event of a new complex emergency, the objective is to ensure a quick and adequate response. This includes:

(a) Continued refinements of existing consultation, needs assessment, planning and response mechanisms to act in the initial stages of a crisis while it is still relatively small-scale;

(b) Emphasis on early clarification of coordination structures;

(c) Improvements in the provision of support (staff, financial, logistic) to the Department's in-country coordinators through joint action with specialized agencies and use of external standby arrangements;

(d) Refinement of the consolidated appeal for a specific emergency to enhance development of a humanitarian strategy that supports allocation of responsibilities, requests for resources and transition to reconstruction and rehabilitation;

(e) Increased use of information technologies to obtain and disseminate information on the humanitarian emergency.

Subprogramme 20.3 Natural disaster reduction

20.8 The Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation, in particular its Plan of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held at Yokohama, Japan, from 23 to 27 May 1994, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/22 A of 2 December 1994, calls for reducing the vulnerability of populations at risk from natural disasters and similar emergencies through the integration of disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation into development planning at the local, regional and national levels. Within the United Nations system and within the international community, this subprogramme provides the bridge between disaster management and development cooperation.

20.9 The objectives of the subprogramme, for which the Disaster Reduction Division is responsible, are to promote:

(a) The integration of disaster reduction strategies into the national development processes of those countries most significantly affected by natural and similar hazards;

(b) Policy commitment and necessary technical support for disaster reduction practices at the country and regional levels;

(c) The application of national risk assessments as the foundation for disaster reduction strategies;

(d) Community involvement in the planning and implementation of disaster reduction measures;

(e) The provision of access to effective early warning systems at all levels of administrative responsibility as an integral part of disaster preparedness and prevention.

20.10 The Disaster Management Training Programme will also have an important role to play in achieving the above objectives. Guided by the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, the Training Programme will provide a training and educational tool for the integration of natural disaster reduction into the national development planning process.

Subprogramme 20.4 Disaster relief

20.11 The main focus of this subprogramme is to assist in mobilizing and coordinating international emergency relief to countries affected by natural or other sudden-onset disasters and to develop ways to strengthen international response capacity. Following an arrangement between UNEP and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, this function also covers environmental emergencies when international assistance is not otherwise provided for under existing specialized conventions or programmes.

20.12 The subprogramme is under the responsibility of the Relief Coordination Branch and its objectives are as follows:

(a) The first objective is to strengthen the existing emergency response system for mobilizing and coordinating international assistance. The system currently consists of standby and contingency arrangements with international partners, the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination programme, the project on the use of military and civil defence assets in disaster relief, emergency telecommunications facilities and the central register of disaster management capacities. These response tools will be upgraded and modified to take into account such technological advances and new opportunities as national and regional disaster preparedness capacities develop. The subprogramme will continue its efforts to develop methodology, identify resources, train staff and representatives and strengthen cooperation between assisting and recipient countries;

(b) The second objective is to strengthen logistics support to the field by assuming coordination functions for storage of relief supplies and their emergency dispatch to disaster-stricken areas, and by promoting the development and application of customs measures to facilitate the speedy delivery of humanitarian assistance as well as regulatory measures to allow unhindered transboundary use of telecommunications equipment during relief operations;

(c) In view of rapid industrial development in different regions, coping with technological accidents and environmental emergencies will present a major challenge for future disaster management. The third objective is to meet this challenge by developing an environmental emergency service that will be available to Member States upon request. The integrated United Nations response

capability of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and UNEP, established for this purpose, will be strengthened throughout the period covered by the plan.

Subprogramme 20.5 Humanitarian emergency information

20.13 Timely, pertinent and credible information on humanitarian issues must be available both to the Emergency Relief Coordinator and to the international community in order to permit accurate analysis of emergencies, provide a basis for effective decisions and assist in the development of policy and advocacy of humanitarian causes.

20.14 The objectives of the subprogramme, for which the Information Management and External Relations Branch is responsible, are as follows:

(a) The first objective is to put in place an effective emergency information network system for preventive action and for a timely, consistent and proactive response. To that effect, present arrangements within the Department for the collection, analysis and dissemination of emergency information of an operational nature will be strengthened. The communications capabilities of its Emergency Operations Centre will be developed in order to facilitate access by humanitarian partners to relevant operational data during emergencies. Particular attention will be paid to the introduction, updating and maintenance of specialized emergency databases in the areas of logistics, mapping and financial tracking of donors' contributions in order to support policy decisions. Electronic public information repositories such as the DHA-on-Line programme and ReliefWeb will be developed on the Internet and through other appropriate means to provide wide access to emergency humanitarian assistance information. Regional and local information networks will be encouraged and developed within the overall context of the Department's information network;

(b) The second objective is the formulation and implementation of information and communication strategies to promote the humanitarian action undertaken by the Department and to work in support of specific humanitarian causes. The intent is to ensure that Governments, non-governmental organizations and the emergency management community at large are kept regularly informed of major humanitarian issues, of the work of the Department on those issues and of the technical and financial needs of the Department to pursue its mandated tasks. Public information campaigns on key humanitarian subjects, such as the damage caused by landmines, will be developed. The provision of substantive information to the humanitarian community will be carried out, inter alia, through a carefully managed publications programme. A photographic library will also be developed;

(c) The third objective is to ensure that the best use is made of modern information technology and that emergency information is issued in an optimum, cost-effective manner. Through development and management of office automation tools and telecommunications systems, the Department's electronic document management system will be developed, including the necessary gateways to the Department's external partners and a modern file classification and records management system to permit instant retrieval of key humanitarian information. Particular attention will be paid to the development of standard electronic

information collection and processing procedures, and to the operation and development of telecommunications links between the Department's headquarters and field offices, including staff training in the use of field communication facilities in complex emergencies.